

## Gold Badge Citation: Jim and Lynette Eldon

My own awareness of Jim and Lynette Eldon as key movers in the folk tradition goes back to the late 1970's, but the true story starts long before that. To put things into context we must look at the emerging Northern folk scene in the late 1950's. In an unprecedented instance of parallel creative development, the Topic folk club in Bradford started in 1956; in 1958 Johnny Handle set up the Bridge Folk Club in Newcastle; in 1962 the Elliot's club in Birtley, Co. Durham was started and in Hull in 1963 the Watsons established Folk Union One.

The 1969 LP "Blue Bell Folk" features performances recorded live at Folk Union One, upstairs at the Blue Bell pub in Hull. By all accounts no more than 200 copies were pressed and it is now seriously rare. Track 6 on that LP features Jim Eldon singing Talcahuano Girls. Other early vinyl forays include Lal and Norma Waterson's 1977 Topic LP 'A True Hearted Girl' on which Jim plays flute and whistle and, from that same year, Mike Waterson's solo LP on which Jim also sings.

Lynette had started clog dancing at the Hull club in 1973 and in 1976 became one of the founding members of Green Ginger Clog, also an offshoot of Folk Union One.

It was around this time that Jim had started collecting folk songs. Travelling around East Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Co. Durham, often working with Steve Gardham, Jim made a series of archive recordings of local musicians and singers. These included itinerant farm workers and many travelling families. The collection reveals oft ignored links between the softer folk stylings of Suffolk and Norfolk and harder music and songs of Tyne and Tees.

Best known among these works are the recordings of East Coast fishermen Robert Leng and Jossy 'Pop' Mainprize from Flamborough Head and the Yorkshire Wolds fiddle and cello player Billy Harrison.

Lynette's understanding of the tradition also comes from direct experience. She first learned to dance from Sheilagh Roberts, who in turn had learned from 2nd generation champion Johnson Ellwood from Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham. Later, Lynette learnt from Johnson Ellwood himself and from his daughter Mary Jameson. In the Ellwood Cup competition in 1976 at Durham Town Hall, Lynette took 3rd place. She took 2nd place in the Northern Counties Clog Championship in 1977 and in 1982 won the championship belt. Lynette also won the pedestal competition in 1983.

Jim is known to thousands of holidaymakers as the 'Brid Fiddler', having performed for many years on the Bridlington pleasure cruiser Yorkshire Belle. Indeed it is in live performance that Jim's true skills come to the fore. An impressive list of independently produced recordings reflect a deep knowledge and love of the tradition. For many festival goers Jim is known for his song writing. It is a mistake to think of these as mere comic songs. Their pathos stems from a shared understanding of the profundity of the mundane and the indomitable strength of human spirit.

The 1997 CD release 'Jim & Lynette Eldon' features an extensive 32 track listing. Almost all are traditional songs, with a standout rendition of 'Lord Bateman'. On several tracks we hear the rhythmic pulse of Lynette's clog stepping. Disc artwork features a sample of Lynette's knitting, as colourful and precise as her dancing and as perfectly crafted as any song that Jim ever wrote.

The story continues. Lynette still teaches dance and she is also a judge for the Northern Counties Clog Championship and the Northumberland Championship. Jim plays for Flamborough Sword Dancers and now for Goathland Plough Stots too. His studio work has included the 2015 'Two Straylarkers' CD release with Corona Smith and the recent 'Fiddle Duets' album with Mossy Christian. His greatest pleasure, though, comes from sharing music in the communities from which he collected.

*Presented by Mike Hirst at on board the Yorkshire Belle at Bridlington.*